

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

AIR UNIVERSITY

**U.S. Strategy for Iran Following its Achievement of Nuclear
Weapon Capability**

by

Marcus K. Glenn, Major, USAF

A Research Report Submitted to the Faculty

In Partial Fulfillment of the Graduation Requirements

Advisor: Dr. Edwina S. Campbell

Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama

April 2009

Distribution A: Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.

Report Documentation Page		Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.		
1. REPORT DATE APR 2009	2. REPORT TYPE N/A	3. DATES COVERED -
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE U.S. Strategy for Iran Following its Achievement of Nuclear Weapon Capability		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
		5b. GRANT NUMBER
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
	5e. TASK NUMBER	
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Air Command And Staff College Air University Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release, distribution unlimited		
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES The original document contains color images.		
14. ABSTRACT <p>Written from the perspective that Iran has already obtained a nuclear weapon capability, this research paper addresses three questions with respect to Iran. Why does the Iranian leadership behave the way it does? What does Iran perceive it will gain with its nuclear weapons? And finally, how should the U.S. respond? Answers to the first two questions are based on observed historical events that build a basic understanding of the nature and logic behind Irans behavior. The proposed U.S. response is based on the analysis that the Iranian regimes behavioral tendencies are pragmatic and likely to remain consistent with their past actions. The Islamic Republic of Iran is a theocratic state with Supreme Leader Khamenei as the final decision maker on all Iranian foreign policies, no matter how much noise President Ahmadinejad makes. Along with the Supreme Leader, a small group of appointed clerics are the true centers of power in Iran. Regime survival is the driving factor for how the Iranian leadership behaves and responds as a state. The Iranian leadership views threats to its survival through lenses that have been shaped by a deep-rooted distrust of Western states, especially the U.S., and struggle to maintain domestic legitimacy. The Iranian regimes calculations on what it will gain from nuclear weapons is not a question of how responsible they will be, but a question of how they view their military options in light of Irans interests, with primacy given to regime survival. There is strong evidence to support the idea that the Iranian leadership would perceive their options for nuclear weapons as for defensive purposes only. Indications also point to the conclusion that Iran can be deterred and that positive internal reform is inevitable but will occur at Irans own pace. Given its offensive and defensive advantages, the U.S. should accept the fact that it has the option to comfortably wait this one out while Iran changes within. A grand strategy of containment would allow the U.S. to frame the nuclear Iran issue within the context of a long-term, consistent policy towards a stable Middle East region.</p>		

15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT SAR	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 26	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the US government or the Department of Defense. In accordance with Air Force Instruction 51-303, it is not copyrighted, but is the property of the United States government.

Abstract

Written from the perspective that Iran has already obtained a nuclear weapon capability, this research paper addresses three questions with respect to Iran. Why does the Iranian leadership behave the way it does? What does Iran perceive it will gain with its nuclear weapons? And finally, how should the U.S. respond? Answers to the first two questions are based on observed historical events that build a basic understanding of the nature and logic behind Iran's behavior. The proposed U.S. response is based on the analysis that the Iranian regime's behavioral tendencies are pragmatic and likely to remain consistent with their past actions.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a theocratic state with Supreme Leader Khamenei as the final decision maker on all Iranian foreign policies, no matter how much noise President Ahmadinejad makes. Along with the Supreme Leader, a small group of appointed clerics are the true centers of power in Iran. Regime survival is the driving factor for how the Iranian leadership behaves and responds as a state. The Iranian leadership views threats to its survival through lenses that have been shaped by a deep-rooted distrust of Western states, especially the U.S., and struggle to maintain domestic legitimacy.

The Iranian regime's calculations on what it will gain from nuclear weapons is not a question of how responsible they will be, but a question of how they view their military options in light of Iran's interests, with primacy given to regime survival. There is strong evidence to support the idea that the Iranian leadership would perceive their options for nuclear weapons as for defensive purposes only.

Indications also point to the conclusion that Iran can be deterred and that positive internal reform is inevitable but will occur at Iran's own pace. Given its offensive and defensive advantages, the U.S. should accept the fact that it has the option to comfortably wait this one out

while Iran changes within. A grand strategy of containment would allow the U.S. to frame the nuclear Iran issue within the context of a long-term, consistent policy towards a stable Middle East region.

For more than three decades, serious efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to create a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East have continued to show no meaningful evidence of success.¹ Unless things drastically change in the Middle East and legitimate peace is established between Israel and all of its regional neighbors, then it is only a matter of time before Israel's asymmetrical weight of military power is balanced by another state in the region. The Islamic Republic of Iran is the most serious contender in the region that is seeking such a balance of nonconventional military power. This research will avoid the endless speculation of attempting to determine what a closed state like Iran has or does not have with respect to nuclear weapons capability, and is written from the perspective that Iran has already crossed the horizontal nuclear weapon threshold and has begun to build up its arsenal. Therefore, now is the time to consider what U.S. national security policy should look like once Iran has nuclear weapons. My contention is that the grand strategy of containment is the most promising policy the U.S. can adopt in dealing with a nuclear Iran.

The goal of this research is to answer three questions with respect to Iran. Why does the Iranian leadership behave the way it does? What does Iran perceive it will gain with its nuclear weapons? And finally, how should the U.S. respond? Answers to the first two questions are based on observed historical events that build a basic understanding of the nature and logic behind Iran's behavior. The proposed U.S. response is based on the analysis that the Iranian regime's behavioral tendencies are pragmatic and likely to remain consistent with their past actions.²

Factors of Iranian leadership behavior

According to Gawdat Bahgat, Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, "the underlying drive for nuclear proliferation is security."³ In the

Middle East and especially in Iran, the terms “state security” and “regime survival” are indistinguishable.⁴ Thus, understanding the primacy of Iranian leadership’s regime survival is important to comprehend their behavior. The Iranian government is structured as a theocratic state with the Shia Islamic rulers representing God in governing a Muslim people.⁵ “Unelected institutions, including the office of the Supreme Leader, the Guardian Council, the judiciary and the security services, are the true centers of power in Iran.”⁶ The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is the most important military authority, with the right to declare war and authorize troop mobilizations. Khamenei serves as the Head of State, and fundamentalist President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad serves as the elected Head of Government.

Ahmadinejad, the prominent leader of the ideological faction of the Iranian regime, is known for his provocative public statements towards Israel and the West. His confrontational rhetoric is an indication of his calculated disregard and disdain for international opinion.⁷ However, there is evidence that Ahmadinejad’s influence among decision makers is limited and that he is politically isolated within Iran. He was elected in 2005 with 50% of the electorate boycotting the election out of frustration with the lack of reform. Most of the voters that sat out the election were Kurds, who number approximately seven million in Iran. Ahmadinejad campaigned on promises to stop repression of political dissent and to generate critical economic reform, but has failed to deliver any change in that direction. To the contrary, he has actually empowered the Republic Guard Corps politically and economically to oppress opposition and he has done nothing to stop widespread government corruption and economic mismanagement. Since the last election in 2005, public frustration and disillusionment has been growing with Ahmadinejad and his broken campaign promises which explains his unpopularity in Iran.⁸

With regard to foreign policy, President Ahmadinejad’s power and influence is limited by the inherent decision making process in the government. Karim Sadjadpour, an Iran analyst with the

International Crisis Group, states, “[Ahmadinejad] is a small piece of the puzzle and can be influential on the fringes, but certainly not [by] steering Iranian foreign or nuclear policy.”⁹ Experts on Iran agree that because Ahmadinejad has little input or influence on Iranian foreign policy, his controversial statements calling for the destruction of the state of Israel should not be interpreted as the official Iranian international position.¹⁰ No matter how much noise Ahmadinejad makes, the Supreme Leader Khamenei is the final decision maker on all Iranian foreign policies.¹¹

The actual group of Iranian decision makers is a small circle of clerics that is “well informed and constrained in its behavior by the competing interests of various individuals and factions.”¹² Contrary to Western perceptions, these leaders are not “mad mullahs” who behave irrationally in pursuit of their religious goals but are leaders who act logically and intelligently in the interests of the state and Shia Islam.¹³ There is historical evidence that supports the pragmatic tendencies of Iranian leadership.

Originally, the founders of the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 believed that their religious principles of sacrifice and martyrdom could serve as the basis for a successful military strategy as the Iran-Iraq War began. However, after suffering thousands of casualties using human wave attacks on Iraq, Iran soon learned the futility of Khomeini’s ideology-based strategy.¹⁴ The Iranian leadership was not only losing on the battlefield, they were also losing popular support for their revolutionary regime. This waning support was manifested by rising disenchantment with the revolution among the general population, draft evasion and “grumblings within the armed forces.”¹⁵ The result was that the revolutionary regime became more pragmatic through the course of the war and was open to do business with Westerners and even Israel out of necessity for military equipment.¹⁶

Once the regime leadership realized that the loss of internal support threatened its survival, it had to choose between what was in the best interest of the survival of the regime and its ideological revolution.¹⁷ When Khomeini chose to end the war in August 1988, he based his decision “only in the interest of the Islamic Republic.”¹⁸ Since then, Iran’s behavior has been predictably pragmatic and its policies have been executed from a realist point of view.¹⁹ David Menashri, Senior Research Fellow at Tel Aviv University, summed up Iran’s post-war demeanor with the following statement: “With few exceptions, whenever ideological convictions have clashed with the interests of the state—as prescribed by the clerical ruling elite—state interests ultimately have superseded revolutionary dogma in both foreign relations and domestic politics.”²⁰

Another aspect that is important in understanding Iranian behavior is the historical context of the Iranian leadership’s distrust of the United States. Iran has had a long history of foreign interference and encroachments that began with waves of Arab and Mongol conquerors centuries ago.²¹ Modern Iran was invaded and subjected to British and Russian colonialism despite Iran’s declared neutrality in World War I and World War II.²² This has led Iran to have a suspicious outlook towards Western states in general.²³ However, Iranian leadership is especially suspicious and hostile towards the U.S. One of the reasons for the distrust is the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) involvement in a coup against the pro-Communist leader Muhammad Mossadeq in order to support the Shah in 1953.²⁴ Iranians often cite this event as an example of U.S. intention to interfere with Iran’s internal affairs and discount their sovereignty.²⁵

Another reason for Iran’s distrust towards the U.S. is because of the support the U.S. provided Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War. Iranian perspective of the war was that the U.S., with its emphasis on human rights, did nothing to stop Sunni leader Saddam Hussein from using chemical WMD on Iranian soldiers and civilians.²⁶ Perception of U.S. indifference to Iranian suffering and

repression of Shia Islam “shaped Tehran’s view of the larger international community”²⁷ and “has led to a pervasive suspicion of the international order, particularly its American guardian.”²⁸

What the Iranian leadership fears can also indicate why Iran behaves the way it does.

Kenneth Pollack, in his testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, stated that Supreme Leader Khamenei’s greatest fear for Iran is that “it will face international sanctions that will limit or preclude the trade, aid, and investment it so desperately requires to keep its foundering economy afloat.”²⁹ This fear is based on the possibility that the regime could lose its hold on power in Iran if the poor economy feeds into a public uprising.³⁰ This internal threat to the regime’s survival is significant with Iran’s massive youth bulge entering the workforce.³¹

Substantial losses of hundreds of thousands of Iran’s youth during the Iran-Iraq War created a void or bathtub effect on its population. Iran is now coming out of this effect and, on its own, cannot create enough jobs for the large number of new workers.³² The resulting high unemployment rate has caused unease with the regime, whose leadership presides over one of the highest brain drains in the world (~150,000 professionals a year emigrate).³³ “The technocrats who manage Iran’s economy have warned that only massive, foreign investment (\$20 billion a year) will be needed just to keep the status quo from deteriorating any further.”³⁴

This reality has led some pragmatic members of the regime to encourage more amiable relations with the U.S. than does the often too belligerent Ahmadinejad.³⁵ Advisors to Ayatollah Khamenei, such as Muhammad Javad Larijani have stated, “We and the U.S. have many differences. But this does not mean that we cannot adopt a regular policy in view of our national interests.”³⁶ Khatami, former Iranian President, echoed this realist perspective by claiming, “From our point of view there are no obstacles preventing economic cooperation with the U.S.”³⁷

The youth of Iran are a source of another fear of the Iranian regime, i.e., the gradual loss of legitimacy of the Islamic revolution among the general population. Only a year after the 1979

Islamic revolution, Iran found itself in a costly war with Iraq. The war, which stemmed from the threat of expanding revolution itself, dragged on for eight years and ended poorly for the regime.³⁸ Twenty-nine years since the revolution, which promised a more just society³⁹ that “nurtured the noble and universal values of Islam,”⁴⁰ the regime has delivered human suffering in war and a poor economic system. The economy is based on a rampant bribe-taking culture⁴¹ and “benefits only an elite group of clerics and their cronies.”⁴² The new generation of Iranians, who are under 26 years old and make up half the population, are moving away from the Khomeinist religious themes and clichés.⁴³ This disillusionment of the youth represents a significant issue for regime leaders, since “throughout its tenure, popular will, however circumscribed by theological fiat, remained an important arbiter of the Iranian state’s legitimacy and thus its very survival.”⁴⁴

Ray Takeyh, who is a senior fellow at the Council of Foreign Relations and has held positions at the National Defense University and Yale University, summed up the Iranian condition as follows:

Iran is a country of contradictions and paradoxes. It is both grandiose in its self-perception yet intensely insecure. It seeks to lead the region while remaining largely suspicious and disdainful of its neighbors. Its rhetoric is infused with revolutionary dogma, yet its actual conduct is practical, if not realistic. A perennial struggle between aspirations and capabilities, hegemony and pragmatism has characterized Iran’s uneasy approach to the Greater Middle East.⁴⁵

It is in this context that the U.S. should attempt to understand Iranian domestic and foreign conduct.

Iran’s calculations on nuclear weapons

In order to formulate a proper response to a nuclear Iran, it is necessary to understand what Iran perceives it will gain with its nuclear weapons. The theocratic government’s fundamental

expectation of nuclear weapons is regime survival. Since Iran and the Shia Islam religion are completely interwoven and essentially synonymous, the regime stands as Shia Islam's authority in the world and its existence is directly linked to the will of God.⁴⁶ "Thus the survival of this government and its form is an existential imperative as well as an expression of self-interest and Iranian nationalism."⁴⁷ The Iranian leadership has learned lessons from how differently the U.S. and the international community have handled states with and without nuclear weapons. They "believe that the only way to ensure the survival of the Islamic Republic--and its ideals--is to equip it with an independent nuclear capability."⁴⁸ As a result, Iran's nuclear weapon efforts are fueled by their desire to prevent the U.S. from successfully influencing, either overtly or covertly, a change of regime.⁴⁹

Kenneth Timmerman argues that once Iran has nuclear weapons the "regime's core values will drive it ineluctably toward aggressive military action, not responsibility."⁵⁰ If this is assumed to be true, then the following question arises: What are the Iranian leadership's viable military options? I believe this is not a question of how responsible the Iranian regime will be, but a question of how it views its military options in light of its interests, with primacy given to regime survival. There is strong evidence to support the idea that the Iranian leadership would perceive their options for nuclear weapons as for defensive purposes only. If Iran chose to initiate an offensive nuclear strike it would be committing regime suicide,⁵¹ since "Iran's leaders undoubtedly know that any use of nuclear weapons against the [U.S.] or its allies...would bring about their utter destruction"⁵² by the ensuing U.S. retaliatory strike. Exiled Iranian Dr. Jahangir Amuzegar, Iran's former economic ambassador, stated that "no Iranian government, no matter how belligerent or stupid, would dare provoke or challenge American or NATO forces," even a nuclear Iran.⁵³ Without any viable offensive nuclear weapon option, it is intuitive that a nuclear Iran would view its only other options with primacy towards the defensive.

Steven Ward, a senior Middle East analyst for the U.S. government, maintains that Iranian Armed Forces regulations provide a starting point to understand the principles of Iran's national security policy.⁵⁴ These regulations, which were established in 1992, "point to an Iranian outlook that is essentially defensive."⁵⁵ Iran's military doctrine and strategy have changed very little since 1992. Despite showing signs of growing confidence in 2005, as it perceived the U.S. being "bogged down" in Iraq, Iran has a primary security strategy that is still based on deterrence.⁵⁶ The Iranian leadership sees a nuclear weapon capability as a means to create a viable deterrent posture that could address a wider range of threats.⁵⁷ Iranian exile, Shahram Chubin, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy Director,⁵⁸ believes the Iranian leadership wants to use a nuclear arsenal to serve as a general hedge from external threats.⁵⁹

Another reason to believe Iran would only use its nuclear weapons for defensive purposes is that Iran has long possessed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and has not employed them in an offensive or aggressive manner.⁶⁰ Iran sees the chemical weapons arsenal that it maintains as a means of deterrence and not "an instrument of an aggressive, revolutionary foreign policy designed to project its power abroad."⁶¹

What Iran likely will not do with its nuclear weapons is give them to terrorist organizations. According to most experts on Iran, it is not likely that the leadership would share its nuclear weapons with anyone, including foreign terrorists, simply because of the punishment it has gone through to build its arsenal.⁶² "Iran's cautious leaders are most interested in remaining in power and fully appreciate that transferring nuclear weapons to terrorists could lead to the type of retaliation from the U.S. or Israel that would eliminate their regime altogether."⁶³ But would Iran pass on the know-how to build a nuclear weapon? Shahram Chubin minimizes the chances that Iran would give nuclear weapon expertise to terrorists, because Iran's relationship with militant groups, for example Hezbollah, "are essentially tactical, and the overlap of interests is

not total.”⁶⁴ It is difficult to imagine why a regime would directly transfer the strategic means to create a scenario where its state survival and vital interests are held at extreme risk.⁶⁵

Iran’s government is founded on the principles of a revolutionary sect of Islam that glorifies martyrdom as the ultimate form of salvation.⁶⁶ During the Iran-Iraq war, Iran demonstrated its willingness to sacrifice its own population by employing human wave attacks against Iraq in an attempt to compensate for its lack of weapons and Iraq’s technological advantages.⁶⁷ Iranian human casualties were estimated between 180,000 and 250,000 by 1987.⁶⁸ This past behavior has caused concern among some who believe that a nuclear Iran would initiate a nuclear strike to bring about its own martyrdom. However, Iranian leadership seems to have reached the limits of its sacrificial theory during the closing months of the Iran-Iraq war when it “began to threaten the theocratic edifice through popular disenchantment, demoralized youth, and grumblings within the armed forces.”⁶⁹ The devastating human toll Iran had paid and the loss of zeal for self-sacrifice invalidated the martyrdom approach.⁷⁰ Jahangir Amuzegar claims the concern over Iran’s martyrdom principle should be put into context: “Some pundits argue that a Shiite belief in martyrdom, coupled with the Iranian regime’s extremist ideology, could render deterrence meaningless. Such people know neither Shiite martyrdom nor the regime leaders’ instinct for self-preservation, nor even the mullah’s *bazaar*i habit of always looking for the best deal.”⁷¹

So far, the discussion has been on what Iran will likely not do with their nuclear weapons. But what does the Iranian leadership perceive it will gain by having nuclear weapons? Currently, Iran’s conventional military force is several generations of capability behind U.S. forces. First and foremost, Iran believes that nuclear weapons will enable it to no longer be vulnerable to a U.S. conventional military attack.⁷² To put in perspective the gap in conventional military power between the U.S. and Iran, one should compare the effectiveness of both forces against a common foe, Iraqi forces under Saddam Hussein. The U.S. conventional forces ripped

through Saddam Hussein's forces in 10 days with only a few casualties in 2003, something Iran could not do in over 8 years and at a cost of perhaps a million casualties.⁷³ The Iranian leadership views the development of nuclear weapons as a way to bridge this conventional gap without having to build a competitive conventional force.⁷⁴

Since Iranian leadership perceives that nuclear weapons will be a credible deterrent to any U.S. conventional attack, they believe the door will be opened for Iran to assume its rightful place as the regional hegemon in the Middle East.⁷⁵ Iran's preeminent sense of identity can be found by observing its heritage and connection to the Persian Empire, "one of the world's greatest superpowers with a monotheistic religion, rich civilization, vast army, elite forms of governance and a wide and expansive territory."⁷⁶ Because of their history and the past prestige of their civilization, Iranians believe they have a special providence to establish regional dominance as a nation.⁷⁷ The only obstacle to Iran's regional hegemonic ambition is the U.S., which is fully entrenched in the Middle East.⁷⁸

Iran's leaders view the dominant U.S. influence in the region as in direct conflict with their interests. Khamenei has indicated that Iran is "strongly opposing [U.S.] domineering policies in the region,"⁷⁹ and that America is "building an empire. They want domination over the whole world."⁸⁰ The Khomeinist regime sees U.S. regional influence as an attempt to reshape the Middle East in its own fashion,⁸¹ which is completely at odds with what the Islamic Republic wants for the region. This perception by the Iranian leadership, who has a deep rooted distrust for the West, has served to amplify sensitivity to U.S. influences.

Whether this distrust is based on the reality of actual historical events or not, Iranians share a common grievance for how the U.S. and other Western states handled the Iran-Iraq war. Iran viewed the bloody eight year war as an unprovoked attack by Saddam Hussein who feared the spread of a Shia Islam revolution into Iraq. Iranians vividly remember how the U.S., France,

Germany, Great Britain and others supported Iraq militarily and financially while the West ignored Iraq's numerous employments of biological and chemical weapons against Iranian military personnel.⁸² In addition, Saddam Hussein's indiscriminate scud ballistic missile launches on major cities in Iran resulted in many civilian casualties. These events "made an indelible mark on Iranian psyche...and imbu[ed] them with a deep sense of vulnerability and insecurity."⁸³

Nuclear weapons, in the minds of the Iranian leadership, counter their external vulnerability and insecurity by preventing any significant U.S. opposition to their foreign policy agenda.⁸⁴ Logic for Iranian leadership's view is based on U.S. behavior towards states that have nuclear weapons compared to those that do not. Kenneth Waltz, one of the most prominent U.S. scholars on international relations, hypothesizes that, "if a country has nuclear weapons, it will not be attacked militarily in ways that threaten its manifestly vital interests. That is 100 percent true, without exception, over a period of more than fifty years."⁸⁵ Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the U.S. has invaded and overthrown the governments of Iraq and Afghanistan, both of which do not have nuclear weapons, but has avoided military action against North Korea, which already had nuclear weapons.⁸⁶ In fact, the U.S. has "conceded to multilateral negotiations with Pyongyang with an offer of economic incentives and security guarantees."⁸⁷

Some experts believe that Iran sees an opportunity to "use" nuclear weapons as a means to amplify its diplomatic leverage within the region as the Soviets used their nuclear weapons in the Cold War by "complicating but not erasing the effects of American military commitments."⁸⁸ With such perceived incentives that would enable Iran to leverage an improved negotiating position and counter its external vulnerabilities, one can understand how the Iranian leadership would be impervious to immediate political costs in the quest of "the ultimate weapon of deterrence."⁸⁹

Finally, the Iranian leadership perceives nuclear weapons as a means to solving its internal political factionalism.⁹⁰ The Islamic regime hopes that the acquisition of nuclear weapons will give its clerical leaders the credentials they need to shore up their hold on power and slow the momentum of reformers who want to “liberalize Iranian society and [its] economy.”⁹¹ Iranian nuclear weapons would be a source of national prestige and benefit politicians among voters who overwhelmingly see nuclear weapons as a means of security.

Iran is desperate for empowerment,⁹² but not desperate for strategic martyrdom⁹³ or regime suicide.⁹⁴ Waltz stated, “If another country gets nuclear weapons, and if it does so for good reasons, then that isn’t an object of great worry.”⁹⁵ Since Iran lives in a dangerous neighborhood, where it considers itself isolated and surrounded by external threats,⁹⁶ the Iranian leadership sees a nuclear capability as “a credible deterrent and a valuable insurance policy”⁹⁷ for regime survival,⁹⁸ not as a means to an offensive, first-strike opportunity.⁹⁹

All this points to the conclusion that Iran can be deterred,¹⁰⁰ and that it would act responsibly with nuclear weapons.¹⁰¹ The U.S. was certainly suspicious of the Soviet and Chinese leaders before they had nuclear weapons, but they both have acted responsibly.¹⁰² In fact, according to Waltz, every state that has gained a nuclear weapon capability after the U.S., has used them for “one purpose and only one purpose, and that’s deterrence.”¹⁰³ Indications that Iran will posture its nuclear weapon capability for defensive purposes only, that its pragmatic decision makers act rationally and, like the Soviets and Chinese, that they can be deterred leads to the final question: How should the U.S. respond and what should be the U.S. grand strategy?

U.S. response

Collin Gray, one of the West’s preeminent civilian strategists, points out that the U.S. is anything but helpless when it comes to dealing with states with nuclear weapons. The U.S. has within its means the ability to establish “robustly layered offensive and defensive counterforce

capabilities, that would help us to cope well enough (if not really well) with the perils posed by WMD.”¹⁰⁴ Given its offensive and defensive advantages, the U.S. should accept the fact that it has the option to comfortably wait this one out while Iran changes within. A grand strategy of containment would allow the U.S. to frame the nuclear Iran issue within the context of a long-term, consistent policy towards a stable Middle East region. Containment offers a broad plan of action that is based on “a psychological assessment of the adversary and an overarching blueprint to guide future U.S. interaction with that adversary.”¹⁰⁵

The origins of the strategy of containment stemmed from the West’s desire to prevent the Soviets from leveraging their significant gains in territory and resources to dominate or manipulate the post-World War II international order.¹⁰⁶ George Kennan, a senior U.S. diplomat in Russia in 1946, is credited with being the chief architect of modern strategy of containment.¹⁰⁷ He wrote a “long telegram” from Moscow to the U.S. State Department to reshape the Truman administration’s failing *quid pro quo* strategy in dealing with the Soviets.¹⁰⁸ This strategy assumed that, if the U.S. could find the right way to deal with the Soviets, then they would cooperate. Kennan believed this strategy was completely missing the mark.¹⁰⁹ The policy-makers back in the U.S. lacked knowledge of the historical and political context that made the Soviet Union function as a state. Robert Hutchings, 2004 Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, believes Kennan’s strategic thought is applicable to international relations today by using “the imperative to go beyond manifestations of a problem and get at its sources, to go from consequences to causes.”¹¹⁰

Because of Kennan’s practical and historical insight into what made the Soviets tick, he was able to accurately portray why the Soviets would not bargain with any external identity. The combination of two factors that seemed to feed on each other bore this out. First, the Soviets were extremely suspicious of every state and viewed all states as a serious external threat to their

nation. Second, Kennan observed that the Soviet leadership was simply “too unsophisticated” to know how to successfully govern its state without the widespread use of repression.¹¹¹ In the view of Soviet leadership, it logically followed that the best method to run a repressive government was a dictatorship, which could be excused, in their minds, by painting an international picture filled with “evil, hostile and menacing” external states that all threatened the very existence of the Soviet Union.¹¹² Kennan argued that the Soviets would not “yield to any form of rational persuasion or assurance”¹¹³ because of their extreme suspicion.

Similarly, Iran’s sense of insecurity and suspicion, which is a product of repeated invasion by foreign armies,¹¹⁴ indicates that it is currently not ready for bargaining.¹¹⁵ However, Takeyh strongly believes that, despite the ebb and flow of the reformist movement in Iran, democratic change is inevitable, but “must come on its own terms, and at its own pace.”¹¹⁶ Until that time, the U.S. should maintain the standoff and patiently wait for internal change in Iran, while containing any attempt by the regime to export terrorism or nuclear weapons. This standoff will require the U.S. to remain focused on the desired stable end state for the region and to maintain a foreign policy that is based on reality, using facts, logic and analysis rather than emotions and rhetoric.¹¹⁷

Negotiations are the ultimate objective of the strategy of containment.¹¹⁸ Accordingly, the U.S. should put a credible bargain on the negotiating table and leave it there, even though Iran is not ready for it now. The offer from the U.S. should be what Iran needs most, foreign investment to create jobs for Iranians.¹¹⁹ This offer would be a tangible indication of U.S. good will to Iran. “The Iranian people need to understand that it is the West (including the United States) that seeks a speedy resolution of mutual differences, and it is the hard-liners in their own regime who refuse to do so.”¹²⁰ Reformists could leverage this choice to strengthen their case against the hard-liners with the Iranian population and provoke the regime to change.

Consistent with U.S. good will for the Iranian people, the U.S. should change the tone of its rhetoric.¹²¹ Iranian hard-liners, like President Ahmadinejad, use confrontational statements from U.S. government leaders to galvanize their base of supporters and allow the predictable hard-line reaction from the population to take hold.¹²² Statements like “the central banker of terrorism” easily inflame Iran’s nationalist constituency, which is inherently suspicious of the West.¹²³ This type of rhetoric works against the reformists’ case that a more amiable relationship with the U.S. is in Iran’s best interests.

The final aspect of containing Iran is to continue to focus on defensive and force protection measures to severely impede Iran’s conventional and nuclear military options.¹²⁴ The U.S. is already working in the region to improve ballistic missile defensive capabilities by selling the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) and the Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) systems to Gulf States.¹²⁵ For surface defensive measures, the U.S. should aid Gulf States in securing border and maritime areas by the sales of combat littoral ships, radar systems and communication gear.¹²⁶

Iran will soon have nuclear weapons. By employing the grand strategy of containment, the U.S. has the opportunity to formulate an adaptive, long term foreign policy that is based on a comprehensive understanding of Iranian behavior, motivation and logic. In other words, knowing what makes the Iranian leadership tick. By examining Iran’s perceptions and interpretation of its long history, the U.S. can analyze how its leaders may react in the future. Historical evidence supports the idea that the Iranian regime’s behavioral tendencies are likely to remain consistent with their past actions¹²⁷ and that it will be responsible with its nuclear weapons and only use them for defensive purposes. Accepting a long term standoff between the U.S. and Iran based on a policy of containment would allow the inevitable internal changes in Iran to play out.

¹ Gawdat Bahgat, *Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 155.

² Isaiah Wilson III, "Rediscovering Containment: The Sources of American-Iranian Conduct." *Journal of International Affairs*, (Spring/Summer 2007, Vol. 60, no. 2), 96.

³ Bahgat, 148.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Helen Chapin Metz, *Iran, a Country Study*. 4th ed. (Washington, Headquarters, Dept. of the Army, 1989), xxvii.

⁶ *Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments: The Gulf States*, no. 21, 2007, (Alexandria, VA: Jane's Information Group, 2007), 57.

⁷ Shahram Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*, (Washington, D.C: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 34.

⁸ Ibid, 57-58.

⁹ Lionel Beehner, "Iran's Multifaceted Foreign Policy," Council on Foreign Relations, 7 April 2006, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/10396#2>, Accessed 27 Jan 2009.

¹⁰ "The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) is currently headed by Ali Larijani. Larijani doubles as Iran's top negotiator on nuclear issues and enjoys close relations with Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has final say over all SNSC decisions. 'Decisions in Iran are made by consensus rather than decree' says Sadjadpour. 'Ayatollah Khamenei rules the country much like a CEO.' Ahmadinejad has some influence over foreign policy—he appoints the cabinet and the head of the SNSC—but power remains mostly in the hands of the SNSC and the Supreme Leader. Lionel Beehner, "Iran's Multifaceted Foreign Policy," Council on Foreign Relations, 7 April 2006, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/10396#2>, Accessed 27 Jan 2009.

¹¹ Kenneth Pollack, "The Threat from Iran," Prepared Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, (Sept 29, 2005), 9.

¹² Willis Stanley, "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Comparative Strategic Cultures Curriculum, (SAIC project prepared for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, 31 Oct 2006), 17.

¹³ Ibid, 17.

¹⁴ David Menashri, "Iran's Regional Policy: Between Radicalism and Pragmatism." *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 60, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2007), 155.

¹⁵ Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*. (New York, NY: Times Books, 2006), 173.

¹⁶ Metz, xxx.

¹⁷ Menashri, 155.

¹⁸ Quoted by Kenneth M. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle*. (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 2004), 233.

¹⁹ Jennifer Knepper, "Nuclear Weapons and Iranian Strategic Culture." *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 27, No. 5, (Oct 2008), 453.

²⁰ Menashri, 155.

²¹ Stanley, 19.

²² Ibid, 18.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Metz, 40.

²⁵ Stanley, 15.

²⁶ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 172 and 176.

²⁷ Ibid, 176.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Pollack, "The Threat from Iran," 9.

-
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 121.
- ³³ *Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments*, 60.
- ³⁴ Pollack, "The Threat from Iran," 9.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ As cited by Ray Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 121.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Interestingly, Iran did not choose to end the war with Iraq until after the U.S. had accidentally shot down an Iranian airliner in July 1988. At this point, Tehran assumed the act was an indication of a more aggressive U.S. support for Iraq. The commanders of Iran's military articulated to the central government that they no longer had the capability to protect the state from both the U.S. and Iraq. Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 174.
- ³⁹ Kenneth Pollack and Ray Takeyh, "Taking on Tehran." *Foreign Affairs* Vol 84, (Mar/Apr 2005), 24.
- ⁴⁰ As cited by Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 2.
- ⁴¹ *Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments*, 58.
- ⁴² Pollack and Takeyh, "Taking on Tehran," 24.
- ⁴³ Amir Taheri, "The World and Iran's Second Revolution." *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Vol. 28, no.2 (Apr 2006), 101.
- ⁴⁴ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 3.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid, 63.
- ⁴⁶ CIA World Fact book, Dec 2008, <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed 5 Jan 2009).
- ⁴⁷ Stanley, 19.
- ⁴⁸ Pollack and Takeyh, "Taking on Tehran," 25.
- ⁴⁹ Bahgat, 149.
- ⁵⁰ Kenneth R. Timmerman, "The Day after Iran gets the Bomb," In *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Ready Iran*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, Oct 2005), 120.
- ⁵¹ Barbara Slavin, "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Iran?" *The Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (Mar 2008), 105.
- ⁵² Colin Dueck and Ray Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Challenge," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 122, No. 2, (2007), 205.
- ⁵³ Jahangir Amuzegar, "Nuclear Iran: Perils and Prospects," *Middle East Policy*, Vol 13, no. 6 (Jun 2006), 98.
- ⁵⁴ Steven R. Ward, "The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine," *Middle East Journal* 59, no. 4, (Autumn 2005), 560.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid, 563.
- ⁵⁷ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 140.
- ⁵⁸ Slavin, 105.
- ⁵⁹ Chubin, 62.
- ⁶⁰ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 147.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² Slavin, 105.
- ⁶³ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 147.
- ⁶⁴ Chubin, 53.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶⁶ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 170.
- ⁶⁷ Dueck and Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Challenge," 196.
- ⁶⁸ Metz, xxix.

- ⁶⁹ “The huge offensive operations with their human wave assaults were no longer a possibility as draft evasion and the loss of revolutionary ardor compelled the army to reduce the scope of its activities.” Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 173.
- ⁷⁰ Dueck and Takeyh, “Iran’s Nuclear Challenge,” 196.
- ⁷¹ Amuzegar, 98.
- ⁷² Pollack, “The Threat from Iran,” 3.
- ⁷³ Thomas Donnelly, “Strategy for a Nuclear Iran,” In *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Ready Iran*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, Oct 2005), 167.
- ⁷⁴ *Jane’s Sentinel Country Risk Assessments*, 111.
- ⁷⁵ Stanley, 24.
- ⁷⁶ Isaiah Wilson III, “Rediscovering Containment: The Sources of American-Iranian Conduct.” *Journal of International Affairs*, (Spring/Summer 2007, Vol. 60, no. 2), 95-112.
- ⁷⁷ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 61.
- ⁷⁸ Chubin., 134.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid, 203.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid.
- ⁸¹ Taheri, 101.
- ⁸² Manochehr Dorraj, “Behind Iran’s Nuclear Pursuit?” *Peace Review*, Vol. 18, no. 3, (Jul-Sep 2006), 326.
- ⁸³ Ibid.
- ⁸⁴ Stanley, 24.
- ⁸⁵ Kenneth Waltz, “A Nuclear Iran: Promoting Stability or Courting Disaster?” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 60, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2007), 137.
- ⁸⁶ Pollack and Takeyh, “Taking on Tehran,” 23.
- ⁸⁷ Dorraj, 327.
- ⁸⁸ Dueck and Takeyh, “Iran’s Nuclear Challenge,” 205.
- ⁸⁹ Dorraj, 326.
- ⁹⁰ Pollack, “The Threat from Iran,” 7.
- ⁹¹ Stanley, 24.
- ⁹² Dorraj, 329.
- ⁹³ Amuzegar, 98.
- ⁹⁴ Dueck and Takeyh, “Iran’s Nuclear Challenge,” 205.
- ⁹⁵ Waltz, 136.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid, 137.
- ⁹⁷ Amuzegar, 97.
- ⁹⁸ Stanley, 19.
- ⁹⁹ Amuzegar, 98.
- ¹⁰⁰ Pollack, “The Threat from Iran,” 4.
- ¹⁰¹ Waltz, 143.
- ¹⁰² Ibid.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid, 145.
- ¹⁰⁴ Collin S. Gray, *The Second Nuclear Age*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner Publishers, Inc., 1999), xii.
- ¹⁰⁵ Wilson, 96.
- ¹⁰⁶ John L. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005), 4.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 23.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 21.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 19.
- ¹¹⁰ Wilson, 97.
- ¹¹¹ Gaddis, 19.
- ¹¹² Ibid, 20.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 61.

¹¹⁵ Kenneth Katzman, "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses," (Congressional Research Service Report, Nov 24, 2008), 45.

¹¹⁶ Takeyh, *Hidden Iran*, 3.

¹¹⁷ Dueck and Takeyh, "Iran's Nuclear Challenge," 204.

¹¹⁸ Gaddis, 287.

¹¹⁹ Pollack, "The Threat from Iran," 9.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 11.

¹²¹ Ray Takeyh, "Time for Détente with Iran," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 86, (Mar/Apr 2007), 29.

¹²² Ali M. Ansari, *Confronting Iran*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 241.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Steven R. Ward, "The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine," *Middle East Journal* 59, no. 4, (Autumn 2005), 567.

¹²⁵ Katz man, 40.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Wilson, 96.

Bibliography

- Ansari, Ali M. *Confronting Iran*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006.
- Amuzegar, Jahangir. "Nuclear Iran: Perils and Prospects." *Middle East Policy*, Vol 13, no. 6 (Jun 2006), 90-112.
- Bahgat, Gawdat. *Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007.
- Beehner, Lionel. "Iran's Multifaceted Foreign Policy," Council on Foreign Relations, 7 April 2006, <http://www.cfr.org/publication/10396#2>, Accessed 27 Jan 2009.
- Chubin, Shahram. *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*. Washington, D.C: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006.
- Donnelly, Thomas. "Strategy for a Nuclear Iran." In *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Ready Iran*, edited by Henry Sokolski and Patrick Clawson, 159-175. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, October 2005.
- Dorraj, Manochehr. "Behind Iran's Nuclear Pursuit?" *Peace Review*, Vol. 18, no. 3, (Jul-Sep 2006), 325-332.
- Dueck, Colin and Takeyh, Ray. "Iran's Nuclear Challenge." *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 122, No. 2, (2007), 189-205.
- Fallows, James. "Will Iran Be Next?" *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 294, No. 5, (Dec 2004), 99-110.
- Gaddis, John L. *Strategies of Containment*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2005.
- Gardiner, Sam. "Dangerous and Getting More Dangerous: The Delicate Situation between the United States and Iran." The Century Foundation, Inc., 2008.
- Gray, Collin S. *The Second Nuclear Age*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1999.
- Jane's Sentinel Country Risk Assessments: The Gulf States. Issue 21, 2007. Alexandria, VA: Jane's Information Group, 2007. 759 p. Iran, pp 57-166.
- Kaplan, Lawrence and William Kristol. *The War over Iraq: Saddam's Tyranny and America's Mission*. San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2003.
- Katzman, Kenneth. "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses." Congressional Research Service Report, Nov 24, 2008.

- Knepper, Jennifer. "Nuclear Weapons and Iranian Strategic Culture." *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 27, No. 5, (Oct 2008), 451-468.
- Menashri, David. "Iran's Regional Policy: Between Radicalism and Pragmatism." *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 60, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2007), 153-167.
- Metz, Helen Chapin. *Iran, a Country Study*. 4th ed. Washington, Headquarters, Dept. of the Army, 1989.
- Office of the President of the United States. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, DC. March 2006.
- Pollack, Kenneth M. *The Persian Puzzle*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 2004.
- Pollack, Kenneth M. "The Threat from Iran." Prepared Testimony before The House Armed Services Committee, (Sept 29, 2005).
- Pollack, Kenneth and Takeyh, Ray. "Taking on Tehran." *Foreign Affairs* Vol 84, (Mar/Apr 2005), 20-34.
- Slavin, Barbara. "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Iran?" *The Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (Mar 2008): 103-107.
- Stanley, Willis. "The Strategic Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran." Comparative Strategic Cultures Curriculum, SAIC project prepared for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, 31 Oct 2006.
- Taheri, Amir. "The World and Iran's Second Revolution." *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Vol. 28, no.2 (Apr 2006), 99-106.
- Takeyh, Ray. "Time for Détente with Iran." *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 86, (Mar/Apr 2007), 17-31.
- Takeyh, Ray. *Hidden Iran: Paradox and Power in the Islamic Republic*. New York, NY: Times Books, 2006.
- Timmerman, Kenneth R. "The Day after Iran gets the Bomb." In *Getting Ready for a Nuclear-Ready Iran*, edited by Henry Sokolski and Patrick Clawson, 113-129. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, Oct 2005.
- U.S. Department of Defense. *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism*. Washington DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006.
- Waltz, Kenneth. "A Nuclear Iran: Promoting Stability or Courting Disaster?" *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 60, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2007), 135-160.

Ward, Steven R. "The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine." *Middle East Journal* 59, no. 4, (Autumn 2005): 559-576.

Wilson III, Isaiah. "Rediscovering Containment: The Sources of American-Iranian Conduct." *Journal of International Affairs*, Spring/Summer 2007, Vol. 60, no. 2, 95-112.